

2014 Wilderness Best Management Practices for Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness

(Including all of Holkham Bay, Tracy Arm, Endicott Arm, and Fords Terror)

Agreements Regarding Vessel Operators

This program is a cooperative effort between vessel operators and the Tongass National Forest. Initiated in 2008, Wilderness Best Management Practices are intended to minimize the impacts of tourism and vessel operations in the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness (which includes Endicott Arm) in a manner that addresses both concerns for our natural resources and operators' concerns for safety and passenger service. By actively participating in this voluntary program, operators demonstrate their commitment to a sustainable use of wilderness resources.

The following agreements will advance wilderness values but are not intended to compromise vessel safety.

PRESERVING QUIET: All operators recognize the importance of quiet and solitude and will minimize vessel announcements and signals while in the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. While interpretation of wilderness values and marine ecology for passengers is important, operators agree to limit their outside announcements to preserve wilderness values of others in the vicinity (see Exhibit A). Operators agree to avoid announcements prior to 8:00am whenever possible, to limit the duration of announcements to about 5 minutes, to limit the number of announcements, and to lower the volume of announcements on outside decks to the minimum required for communication and safety. Operators agree to follow the Forest Service's recommended locations for these interpretive announcements (see Exhibit B map). The Forest Service will also attempt to provide alternative methods of interpretation such as brochures, maps, and podcasts. Certain signals and announcements are necessary and required by the US Coast Guard for navigational and safety reasons.

MAINTAINING CLEAN AIR: All vessel operators agree to comply with the Marine Vessel Visible Emissions Standards (18 AAC 50-.070) and take all available and reasonable steps to minimize visible stack emissions while in Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. Recognizing that the unusually cold, still air of these glacial fjords can trap persistent haze, operators agree to take proactive steps to manage visible emissions, such as seeking engineered solutions and improvements to emissions monitoring. Visible stack emissions are regulated by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and monitored by the US Forest Service in cooperation with Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Forest Service rangers will provide timely feedback to vessel operators resulting from their observations.

PROTECTING WILDLIFE: All operators agree to conduct their business in a manner which, whenever possible, avoids changing the natural behavior of wildlife in their vicinity including bears, whales, and nesting birds such as terns and oystercatchers.

All operators agree to follow the Humpback Whale Approach Regulation and familiarize their crews with the NOAA Code of Conduct for viewing marine mammals. Both documents are described on the NOAA website: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/mmv/guide.htm>.

Harbor seals, sea lions and whales are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which prohibits causing injury or disturbance or disrupting behavioral patterns (i.e., breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering). All operators agree to remain **a minimum of 100 yards** away from seals on icebergs whenever possible.

All vessel operators, including those operating auxiliary boats and kayaks, agree to **reduce speed** when approaching hauled out seals, and to gradually increase speed when leaving the site in order to minimize wake. Sudden changes

in speed are more likely to startle seals and wakes can rock or tip icebergs, causing seals to slip off, separating mother-pup pairs.

PRESERVING SOLITUDE: All operators recognize the importance of an authentic Alaskan experience of wilderness and agree to help preserve solitude through the following measures:

- **SCHEDULES:** Operators of vessels with more than 250 passengers agree to avoid scheduling visits to Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness in a way that, due to vessel traffic, necessitates use of Endicott Arm. Each season, a small number of cruise ships may schedule visits to Endicott Arm due to unavoidable scheduling conflicts in Tracy Arm. Dates will be provided in the spring.
- **ENDICOTT ARM:** While vessels with more than 250 passengers agree to avoid scheduling operations in Endicott Arm, it is recognized that some visits to Endicott Arm may occur when ice, tidal conditions, vessel traffic, fog, or other vessel and passenger safety concerns limit operations elsewhere. In the event that vessels with more than 250 passengers transit Endicott Arm, operators will do their utmost to minimize the impact of wakes on paddlers, smaller boats, and wildlife, including bears, nesting birds, and hauled-out seals.
- **FORDS TERROR:** Vessels with more than 250 passengers agree not to enter Fords Terror, including the portion that opens from the north shore of Endicott Arm. All operators of motorized vessels agree to minimize their speed and wake around paddlers and to avoid them whenever possible, maintaining a safe and respectful distance. Paddlers acknowledge that use of the marine radio to announce their presence will assist motorized vessel operators in achieving these goals.

COMMUNICATION: All operators acknowledge the importance of communication to the success of this agreement and pledge the following commitments:

- to engage over the course of the winter, in annual discussions about previous summer's implementation of the agreement and possible changes for the upcoming summer.
- to use the marine radio to share information which is imperative to navigation such as vessel traffic and ice flows. Operators agree to keep such communications short and to avoid unnecessary conversations.
- to use the Forest Service sponsored blog to share schedule changes, ice conditions, provide feedback, or other information and concerns about Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness.
<http://wildernessbmp.pbworks.com/w/page/14933240/FrontPage>
- Operators of vessels with over 250 passengers agree to use the blog to keep other operators informed of any schedule changes, which may involve diverting from Tracy Arm to Endicott Arm, cancelling calls altogether, or making significant timing changes, and will do so in a manner that provides as much notice as possible.
- to recognize the role of the Forest Service in sharing information and observations about the Wilderness Best Management Practices implementation in the field.

KEEPING IT ALIVE: All vessel operators agree to include these guidelines in annual training and respective policies and procedures documentation. Operators will provide feedback about compliance with the above guidelines to other operators and the appropriate agency.

Send emails to:

kehood@fs.fed.us

sjensen@fs.fed.us

EXHIBIT A
RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR INTERPRETIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following is a summary of locations where outside announcements would affect the fewest visitors: (see map)

- 1) Stephens Passage before entering Holkham Bay would be a good place to introduce Tracy Arm. Since the waterway is wide, announcements would not impact campers, kayakers, fishermen on shore, beach-walkers, hunters and other users of the wilderness area.
- 2) There is an approximate five-mile stretch beginning one mile east of the Tracy Arm elbow and ending one mile west of the first large U-shaped valley on the north shore. This would be a good area for short (5 minute) interpretive announcements to be made to guests (between N57.922776/W133.563637 and N57.915954/W133.452213).
- 3) There is another approximate four-mile stretch within the Tracy Arm S turns. It begins one mile north of the third U-shaped valley on the south shore, approximately eleven miles east of the elbow. It ends 1.5 miles west of Sawyer Island. This would be a good area for short interpretive announcements to be made to guests (between N57.887659/W133.307565 and N57.884008/W133.213526).
- 4) At the end of Tracy Arm, a few miles from South Sawyer Glacier is another area where there is an opportunity to present a short (5 minute) interpretive announcement (between N57.860754/W133.131673 and the face of the S. Sawyer Glacier). It would be preferable to leave a “quiet zone” within a few miles of Sawyer Island, to ensure a more peaceful environment for those people who may be camping on the island.
- 5) P.A. announcements are more likely to disturb visitors and wildlife in Endicott Arm due to the greater amount of islands, bays and anchorages. The recommended location for announcements in Endicott Arm is between one mile southeast of the entrance to Fords Terror and one mile northwest of the entrance to North Dawes Inlet (between N57.585560/W133.163017 and N57.515926/W133.053845).

Recommended language for PA announcement in Stephens Passage or just prior to entering Tracy/Endicott Arm, and/or for printing in ship’s daily program onboard which explains the intentions of this joint effort between all vessel operators and the USFS:

We’re about to enter one of the most pristine Alaskan environments that we’ll see on our voyage. Tracy Arm is a thirty-mile glacial fiord that reaches deep into the Coast Mountains and deep into our glacial past. With old-growth temperate rain forest here at its beginning and active tidewater glaciers at its upper reaches, our visit to Tracy Arm is a trip in time back to the Pleistocene ice age.

Tracy Arm is a special place. Recognizing its extraordinary biological, scenic, and recreational values, Congress protected the surrounding land as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The designation provides permanent protection for this part of the Tongass National Forest, ensuring that it remains a place of wild nature. It’s a land for wildlife, timeless forests, and the enjoyment of the American public.

To help preserve Tracy Arm’s wild character, tour companies and the Tongass National Forest created a set of guidelines for visiting the area. Our cruise company helped develop the guidelines and proudly supports their goals, which include special considerations for wildlife, air quality, and other natural systems. In accordance with the agreement, we will limit our outside announcements within the fiord, helping preserve a quiet environment both for wildlife and for other visitors. During the next few hours, our naturalists will make a few announcements about the area, but otherwise we invite you to sit back and enjoy this spectacular part of our rich national heritage.

Exhibit B map: Yellow zones depict areas where public announcements might be least disruptive

